

palace charade by theheartclub

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Summary:

the first person that mike and will come out to might not be who you would think

palace charade

Will Byers loves his job. It isn't the best out there, but he's seventeen years old, and he's happy spending most afternoons and evenings at the Palace Arcade. Walking through those doors never failed to bring back fond memories. Late nights spent hunched over machines that held every last penny to their names, screaming and cursing at pixels on a screen, the ever so present scent of body odor from the surrounding young teens. Sometimes while Will was playing Mike would rest his hand at the small of his back.

It was a pleasant place to work. Even if it means working with Keith a majority of the time.

The party had always had a bit of a rivalry with the older teen working there. While he was admittedly annoying at times, Will never really had much of a personal problem with him. He could never tell Dustin that, though.

It was nearing the end of the night now, which meant Keith had already left for home close to ten minutes prior while Will waited around for the lingering few to finish up before he made his own way out for the night. This was always the tough part. Will could never bring himself to ask the kids there to leave. Being the one to spoil all of the fun they were having always seemed cruel.

There was no harm in a few more minutes, he always told himself. Besides, he couldn't leave right away anyway. Mike was his ride for the night and he hadn't shown yet. Will had a car to use now, Jonathan's while he was away at school, but Mike had a shift at the record shop down the road ending around the same time and insisted on stopping by once it was done to give Will a lift. It was something he did often.

Will wasn't stupid. An excuse to see Mike and money saved on gas wasn't something that he was ever willing to turn down. Now more than ever with the knowledge that a ride home probably wasn't all that this would be. He didn't exactly have to be convinced.

Things hadn't exactly been normal as of late. Well, a little less than

normal for the two of them. It's been a couple weeks since it happened.

It was a night that replicated many others; the whole Party spread out across Mike's basement. It had started as a game night, but with what typically comes with that, madness soon ensued. By the end of the night, once everyone else had tired themselves out enough to begin slowly filtering out, Mike and Will were left on their own. This wasn't unnatural. The two could often be found by their lonesome. Except what followed shortly wasn't exactly routine.

It was with shortness of breath and quivering hands that Mike and Will kissed for the first time. It was Mike who made the move, even if Will had been planning it in his head for years now. Little did he know, they both had.

It was gentle at first. It wasn't the first time either of them had kissed another person. Mike's Eleven, and Will's a nice boy, the only boy to have taken him out on a date. It was to the movies, they held hands once the lights were down and kissed in the alleyway beside the theater. Not the most romantic, but obviously it didn't last. It never could have when Will was there purely in attempt to find someone like Mike did.

But now, Mike didn't have anyone anymore. Him and El had broken up once they realized that what they had was nothing more than a middle school-esque puppy love, and they would much rather remain nothing more than friends. Will did his best to hide a smile while he was being told, saving the jumping up and down for when he was alone in his bedroom.

That excitement soon faded once he realized that none of that meant Mike was his, it only meant that he wasn't El's anymore. Mike didn't even like boys like Will did, at least it seemed that way. What him and El had may not have been as real as they wanted, but Mike still seemed to enjoy being with her.

Except now Will didn't know what to think because Mike seemed to enjoy kissing him too. A lot. That first time in the basement wasn't just a cautious first kiss, something to test the waters if unsure. What Mike did was sure. The initial uncertainty of the kiss wore off within

moments, what was at first a dip became fully immersed. Mike pulled while Will pushed, their hands grasping at any part of the other boy they could find. They didn't separate until they heard Karen Wheeler's voice calling from upstairs to tell Will that his brother was there to pick him up. It was at that they jumped apart almost as if they had been shocked.

It was a thing now. Any time that the two of them were left alone, they were kissing. It's after school and they're the only ones that could make it to AV that day. There's nothing abnormal about it, they've spent a great deal of time on their own in their running on ten plus years of friendship, but Mike spots a lock on the door that he's never noticed before, and suddenly Will's grasping at the table for stability because Mike's body is pressed against his own and they're attached at the lips but it doesn't stop there. Will knocks the radio attachment that Lucas had been waiting weeks for off of the table, but he can feel the wet heat of Mike's mouth on his neck and suddenly he's forgetting what A.V. even stands for.

They kiss in Mike's bedroom, and Will's living room couch when his mom and Jonathan are both at work, and in the Wheeler's basement, and in the back of Mike's car. One time in the backseat of Jonathan's car when he let Will borrow it for the night (which Will felt so, so guilty about when he returned the keys). Needless to say, he got over it because when he sees Mike the next day they make out in the school bathroom until Jeremy Goldberg comes in and doesn't leave for another twenty minutes because he apparently has something *really* stuck in his braces and Will then becomes in charge of checking to make sure he 'really got it out this time'.

Once the arcade has finally cleared out, Will is sweeping up the pretzel crumbs and cheese dust from the floor when he starts to feel like Mike might not show. It's quite implausible, being that Mike would never just ditch him like that, but maybe something happened. This is proven false once Will returns from the storage room with a bottle of water to find Mike hunched over at a machine, his focus closed off to the rest of his surroundings.

Will smiles when he's finally close enough to recognize the game as *Dig Dug*. "You know even if you beat her score, she'd win it back in one shot. She works like that. If someone beats her it's like her fuel."

Max has held reign of this game for years now. Even when Dustin will occasionally beat her high score after hours of dedication, she wins it back like she never even lost it. Mike isn't even on the leaderboard.

Mike huffs out a sigh as he turns around. "One day I'm gonna get so good she's not gonna know what hit her."

Will smiles, pretending to zip his lips shut. "Whatever you say. Your secret is safe with me."

"You ready to head out? I'm sorry I was running a bit late, there was some guy who just wouldn't leave, and I'm not supposed to 'interrupt the customer on their music journey'."

Will laughs at that, patting Mike on the shoulder. He didn't realize how out of place that felt now that they'd ventured into much more intimate realms of their relationship until after it happened. He's quick to regain composure. "Your suffering has not gone unnoticed. I just have to grab my jacket from the back."

They start in there purely to get Will's jacket, but then they can't find it, and somehow Mike's mouth ends up on his and Will finds himself pressed up against one of the older broken machines that desperately needs fixing. It's needless to say that Will can't even remember why they were in there in the first place.

"Wheeler?"

Mike detaches himself from Will with the force of someone who was pulled harshly. Will barely has time to compose himself and realize what exactly just happened because suddenly he's staring at Keith, who is standing in the doorway staring right back at him. Well, his gaze is jumping between Mike and Will alike, looking as though he's doing his best to piece it all together in his head.

Will can feel all of the color drain from his face as it all crashes down on him. Keith, his boss, just caught him making out with his best friend, a boy, in the storage room of his place of employment. He's so getting fired. He's getting banned, both of them are, and after that Keith is gonna tell everyone he knows. Will's life is quite simply over.

“Keith,” Will breathes, his voice shaky and quieter than he planned on it coming out. “Please, please don’t tell anyone. I know-”

Out of the corner of his eye, Will spots his jacket hanging off of the machine next to him. He quickly grabs it, holding it securely over his lap. He’s seventeen, on a bad day, watching someone put a straw through a lid could render him in this state. Besides, he really, really likes Mike.

Luckily, Mike cuts in instead. “It was my fault. I mean Will, he really didn’t do anything wrong. I persuaded him, and-”

“Guys,” Keith says, but both boys seem to be too frazzled to notice.

“Please,

don’t tell anyone. I’ll get you that date with my sister, for real this time. I’ll do anything, just please don’t say anything, and don’t fire Will. He doesn’t deserve it.”

“Guys.”

They’re silent this time.

“I’m not gonna tell anyone anything,” Keith states, and Will feels like he can breathe again. “You little weirdos are strange enough. If I haven’t done anything by now this certainly isn’t what would break me.”

“So, you’re really not gonna say anything?” Mike asks, carefully like one wrong move could undo the decision.

“Nope. I’m not really concerned with your love lives, surprisingly enough.”

Will blinks, still trying to process it all. “You’re really not firing me?”

Keith shakes his head. “This isn’t exactly what I would consider grounds for me to have to go through the trouble of finding someone else to take your spot. You’re good at your job, Byers.”

“Thank you,” Will says, and it’s with the utmost sincerity. It’s all he

can really manage at the moment.

“Don’t mention it,” Keith says with a wave of his hand, finally stepping in through the doorway. “Now if either of you have seen my Super Fighter that would be a huge help.”

Super Fighter, Mike thinks. *You almost tore our lives to pieces over a fucking Super Fighter?* For their sake, he kept his mouth shut and helped look.

Once Keith leaves and they’re alone again Will pushes a hand through his hair with a deep sigh, falling back into one of the chairs.

“Will?”

Will looks up to Mike, offering a small smile. “Mike.”

“You okay?” There’s caution in Mike’s tone. It’s comforting for Will to hear.

“Yeah, yeah. Just trying to you know, gather my thoughts. I’m okay.”

Mike nods. “You know,” he starts, a deep breath following. “I’ve been thinking, about this whole thing. It’s great, really. I just, I dunno, this got me thinking. Like, if Keith had told people, what would he say? Because we aren’t a couple.”

Will wanted to let himself get upset. Scared or angry even. But he couldn’t. Whatever Mike was about to say, which he had a feeling was gonna be about breaking this whole thing off, he should have seen it coming. He couldn’t have really thought that this was going to last forever, could he?

“I don’t want this anymore, Will.”

There it was, and he didn’t even know what to say in response. Luckily, or unluckily, Mike speaks again.

“I mean, I do. I do want all of this, but I don’t want it as your friend. I want it as your, well, your boyfriend. If you don’t want that, I get it. Trust me, I get it. I just, I really, really care about you, Will, and not like I care about Lucas or El. I’m not really sure how to describe it,

but I think you understand. I don't think people feel the way that I feel about someone that they're just friends with."

Will smiles. Really, he isn't quite sure what else he can do. This is worthy of more than just jumping up and down alone in his bedroom. He stands with a force that makes the chair he was sitting in wobble for a moment before settling down again, crashing forward into Mike's arms.

"I feel the same exact way," he says, his face pressed against the soft fabric covering Mike's shoulder.

"The exact same way?" Mike asks, and it isn't even as a joke.

Will laughs anyway. This time it's out of relief. "Exactly. As exact as you can get."

Mike smiles, pressing his nose into Will's hair. "So, you're my boyfriend now?"

"Only if you're mine."

"I'm all yours."

The words that Will had been waiting to hear for longer than he had realized felt like a gift, one that he would hold onto tightly as long as he could. He had a feeling he could keep a tight grip for a pretty long time.